DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 042 553 24 RC 004 614

AUTHOR Peterson, John H., Jr.; Richburg, James R.
TITLE Community Background Reports: The Mississippi Choctaws and Their Educational Program. National Study of American Indian Education, Series I, No. 21, Final Report.
INSTITUTION Chicago Univ., Ill.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
BUREAU NO BR-8-0147
PUB DATE 1 Jun 70
CONTRACT OEC-0-8-080147-2805
NOTE 46p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$2.40
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Organization, Adult Education Programs, *American Indians, *Community Action, *Demography, *Educational Programs, Parent Participation, *School Community Relationship, Teacher Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS *Choctaws, Mississippi

ABSTRACT

General research by an anthropologist and experiences of an educator during a 2-year period form the basis for this report on education of Mississippi Choctaw Indians. A discussion of the physical and cultural environment of the Mississippi Choctaw is followed by a description of the organization, facilities, personnel, and programs of Choctaw schools. Significant trends emerging in Choctaw education include a greater degree of self-determination by Choctaws, more community participation in educational decision-making, and a greater emphasis on Indianization in curriculum and in educational programs. (JH)

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NATIONAL STUDY OF AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION

USOE
PROJECT NO. OEC-0-8-080147-2805

FINAL REPORT

Community Background Reports

Series I

No. 21

The Mississippi Choctaws and Their Educational Program

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Mississippi State University
and
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RC004614

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NATIONAL STUDY OF AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION

The attached paper is one of a number which make up the Final Report of the National Study of American Indian Education.

This Study was conducted in 1968-69-70 with the aid of a grant from the United States Office of Education, OEC-0-8-080147-2805.

The Final Report consists of five Series of Papers:

I. Community Backgrounds of Education in the Communities Which Have Been Studied.

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THE MISSISSIPPI CHOCTAWS AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

A Report for the National Study of American Indian Education

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June 1, 1970

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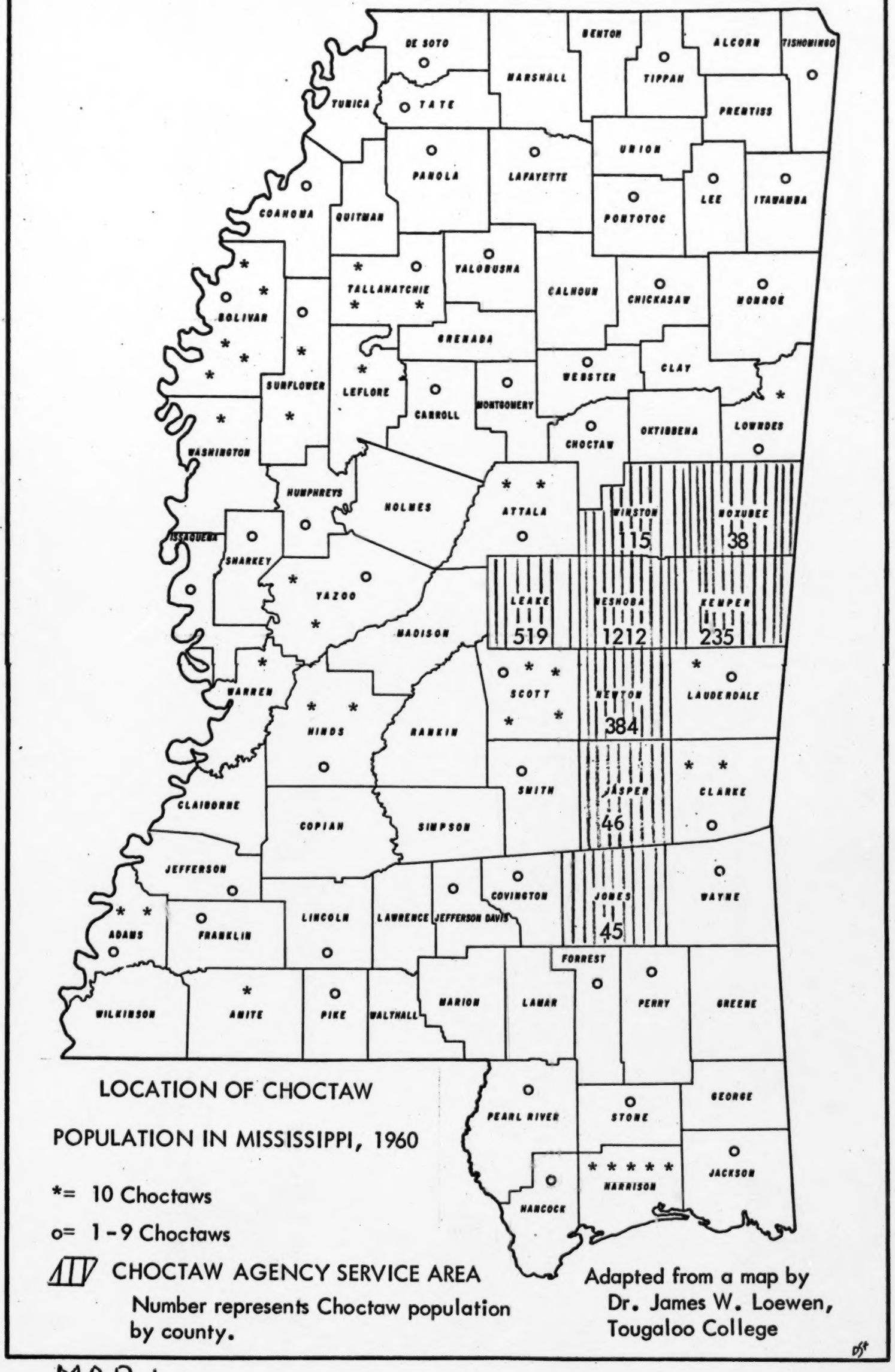
PREFACE

This report is based on our combined field work with the Mississippi Choctaws from July 1, 1968, to June 30, 1970. During this time, John H. Peterson, Jr., an anthropologist, undertook general research on the Choctaw communities, including supervision and analysis of a total tribal survey; James R. Richburg, an educator, held a fulltime position in the Follow Through Program of the Choctaw schools. Our study of the Mississippi Choctaws and their educational system, of which this is only a small part, was made possible by the concerted efforts of a great many people.

Mr. Peterson's fieldwork was supported in part by a Phelps-Stokes Fellowship in Sociology and Anthropology provided by the University of Georgia. Superintendents of the Choctaw Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Mr. James B. Hale and Mr. John F. Gordon, and Choctaw officials, Mr. Emmett York and Mr. Philip Martin, gave their fullest cooperation and encouragement to the tribal survey. Personnel of the Choctaw Agency undertook most field interviewing and assisted with the editing of the questionnaires in addition to carrying out their regular duties. Dr. James E. Wall of the Mississippi State Research Coordinating Unit for Vocational-Technical Education helped secure funds for the analysis of the data, and the staff of the Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University, contributed expert advice and assistance.

Mr. Richburg's job in the Choctaw schools was made possible by the Parents' Policy Advisory Committee of the Choctaw Follow Through Program, which continuously gave him the fullest possible support in his efforts. He is also grateful for the cooperation given him by the educational administrators and teachers of the Choctaw schools and parents and students participating in the Follow Through Program.

Finally, and most important, we are both grateful to the Choctaw people who contributed to our work in more ways than we can acknowledge.



LOCATION OF CHOCTAW

POPULATION IN MISSISSIPPI, 1960

*= 10 Choctaws

o= 1-9 Choctaws

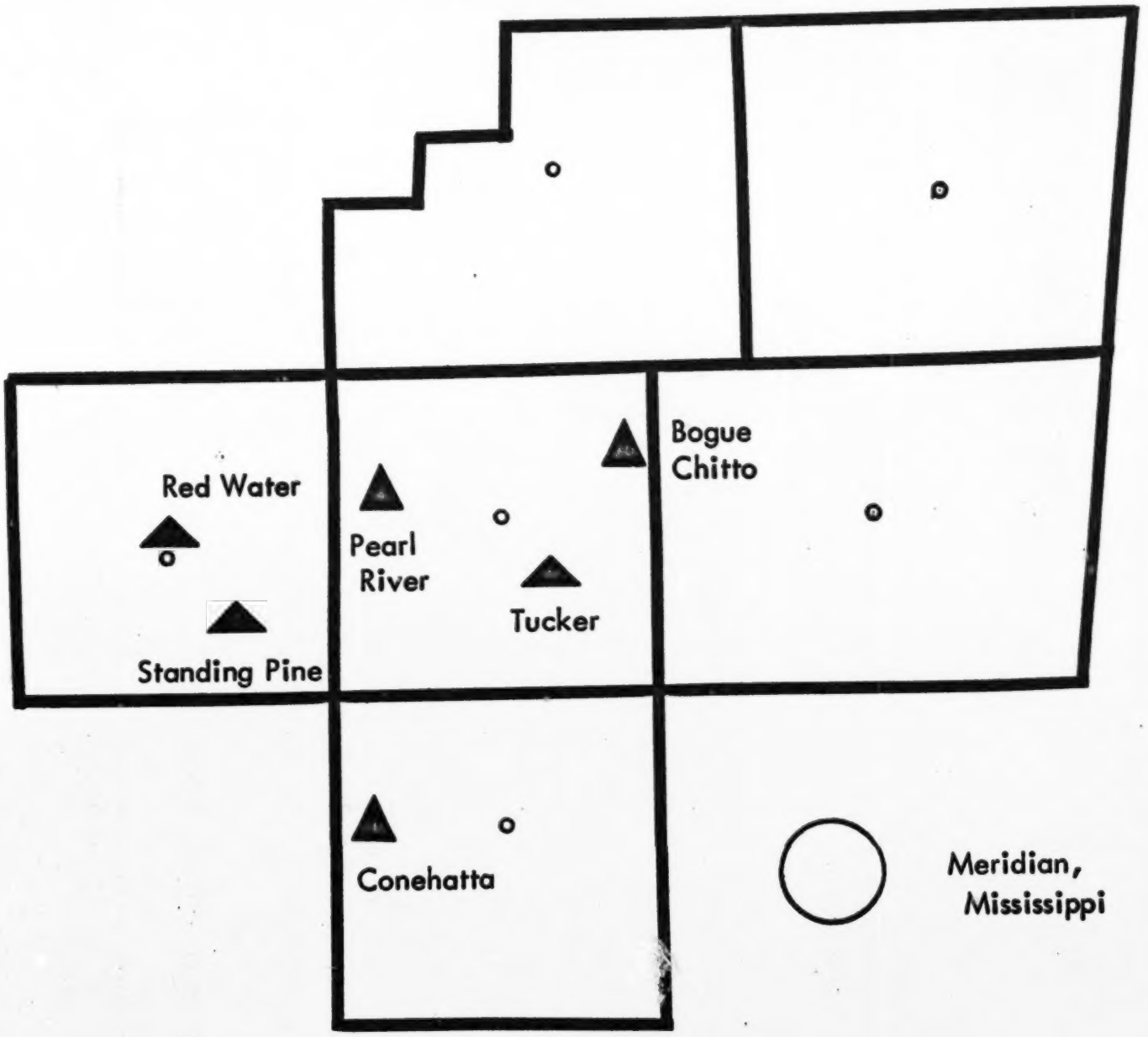
CHOCTAW AGENCY SERVICE AREA

Number represents Choctaw population by county.

Adapted from a map by
Dr. James W. Loewen,
Tougaloo College

MAP 1

LOCATION OF CHOCTAW COMMUNITIES IN MISSISSIPPI



▲ Choctaw community 500 or more people

▲ Choctaw community less than 500 people

o County Seat

Outlined area represents the service area of the Choctaw Agency

MAP 2

THE MISSISSIPPI CHOCTAW

Physical Environment. The majority of the Choctaws in Mississippi remain in their traditional homeland in the Sand Clay Hill region of East Central Mississippi. This is a maturely dissected plateau averaging, in the center, 350 feet above sea level.

The area divides the drainage basins of the Pearl River flowing to the west and south and the tributaries of the Tombigbee River flowing to the southeast. Generally, the topography is rough and hilly except for the broad flat bottom areas along the major streams, and small areas of relatively rolling upland terrain. The rough sandy clay hills are steep, and gullying is characteristic of the area. Most of the steep slopes are in pine and oak forests, while the bottom land forests are mainly hardwood. The gentle slopes and bottom land soils are fairly fertile and are used primarily for row crops and pasture, although subject to periodic flooding in low areas.

The area has a moist mild climate. December and January are the coldest months with mean minimum temperature of 36.9 degrees, while August is the hottest month, with a mean maximum temperature of 92.1 degrees. The mean total precipitation annually is 54.2 inches which is fairly evenly distributed throughout the year. March is normally the wettest month with a mean rainfall of 6.4 inches and October is usually the driest month with only 1.9 inches of rainfall.

Transportation. No U. S. highway passes through the Sand Clay Hills. While the area is adequately served by paved state highways and secondary roads, most roads in the area were unpaved until after World War I. Even today, the many unpaved clay roads are sometimes hazardous during periods of heavy winter rains.

History.[1] The Choctaws comprised the largest tribe of Indians inhabiting Mississippi prior to white settlement. Living primarily from agriculture, they outdistanced all other Southeastern tribes except the Cherokee in adopting white customs and institutions. The Choctaws are proud of the fact that they never bore arms against the United States, fighting on the side of the new nation both in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Nevertheless, as settlers demanded more agricultural land, most of the Choctaws, along

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[1]Little research has been done on the Mississippi Choctaw's history or social conditions after 1830. Angie Debo, The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), remains a basic work on the history of the Choctaws prior to removal and the Oklahoma Choctaws after removal. John R. Swanton, Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians, (Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103, 1931), is the best reference on traditional Choctaw life and survivals among the Mississippi Choctaw in the early Twentieth Century. The best study of the history of the Mississippi Choctaws since 1830 is Charlie M. Beckett, "Choctaw Indians in Mississippi Since 1830," (M. A. Thesis, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1949). The first general study of the Mississippi Choctaws is Charles Tolbert, "A Sociological Study of the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1958). The information in the above two works is expanded and up-dated in John H. Peterson, Jr. "The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians: Their Recent History and Current Social Relations," (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Georgia, 1970).

with other tribes from the Southeast, were forced to migrate to Oklahoma.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, as they are legally known, are the decendants of those Choctaws who chose to remain in Mississippi during the period of Indian removals of the early Nineteenth Century. Their forefathers either failed to receive land in Mississippi as provided under the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek of 1830, or lost possession of land they did receive. Many dispossessed Choctaws moved to Oklahoma during the following decades, but between one and two thousand Choctaws remained in their traditional homeland. Here they formed a small minority in a society dominated by whites and composed largely of whites and Negroes.

The constant struggle to maintain their separate ethnic identity is the dominant theme of both Choctaw history and contemporary social relations. Prior to the Civil War, the Choctaws occupied the locally incongruous position of being defined as non-white, but being non-slave. They maintained this position by being squatters on marginal land isolated from both whites and Negroes. With the freeing of slaves, most Negroes and some whites became sharecroppers. Only then did Choctaws become sharecroppers, but they maintained their social isolation by establishing their own Choctaw churches, and later participated in separate Choctaw schools.

The development of separate Choctaw communities, patterned after white and Negro rural communities but remaining

distinctly Choctaw, was well underway in 1903 when the Federal Government again removed many Choctaws to Oklahoma as part of Dawes Commission's work in preparing Oklahoma for statehood. However, many Choctaws again refused to leave Mississippi, and many of those who left later returned. Recognizing the failure of removal efforts, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established The Choctaw Agency in 1918.

While the Bureau of Indian Affairs improved Choctaw living conditions, in the past the lack of funds for fully implementing the Bureau's programs resulted in little significant change in the pattern of life within Choctaw communities. A land purchase program enabled some Choctaws to become farmers on trust land but most remained sharecroppers. All were dependent upon the fluctuations of the market for their one cash crop - cotton. The lack of a Choctaw high school prior to 1964 resulted in most Choctaw students receiving only a basic elementary education. Choctaws were generally denied non-agricultural jobs and lacking both necessary skills and knowledge about life outside the Choctaw communities, there was little out-migration. As a result, most Choctaws remained until recently, marginal farmers in isolated rural communities, where they continued to have only limited contact with whites or Negroes.

The strongly entrenched pattern of ethnic separation that exists in the Choctaw area has been and continues to be a major factor in the Choctaw-non-Choctaw relationships. Whites and Negroes comprise respectively approximately 65

and 30 percent of the population in the Choctaw area, whereas the Choctaws comprise less than 5 percent of the population. While local whites recognize that Choctaws are Indians, not Negroes, Choctaws are still locally defined as non-whites and are subject to much the same restrictions as the Negro population. Choctaws are denied service in most local white eating establishments and all of the white beauty and barber shops. Until recently, Choctaw children were not admitted to white schools and Choctaws still are not allowed to attend local white churches. Where they are denied white status and the right to participate in white institutions or use white facilities, the Choctaws have the choice of using Negro facilities and thereby accepting non-white status, or remaining to themselves and thereby maintaining their status as neither white or black. Wherever possible, the Choctaws consistently chose the latter alternative.

They still rarely associate with non-Choctaws, and where possible, have organized and utilized their own separate institutions and facilities. Such separate development has been handicapped in the past by the dispersed settlement pattern in the seven Choctaw communities. Nevertheless, the Choctaws have been quite successful in maintaining their separate ethnic status in the local area.

Population.[1] Between 1920 and 1960 the total Choctaw population in Mississippi, as recorded by the U. S. Census, has grown from 1,105 to 3,119. In 1960, 83 percent of the Choctaw population of Mississippi lived in an eight-county area which included the seven Choctaw communities. This report is limited to the Choctaws inhabiting this eight-county area depicted on Map 1. The Choctaw population in this area increased from 2,594 in 1960, to 3,127 in 1968. It must be remembered that some of this apparent population increase resulted from the under-enumeration of the Choctaw population in earlier censuses.

The Choctaw population is predominantly young, 59 percent being under the age of 20. While the proportion of Choctaws below the age of 20 has remained relatively stable over the past eight years, recent out-migration has produced noticeable changes in the age, and sex composition of the population over 20 years of age. Out-migration, primarily by younger males, has created an unbalanced sex ratio among Choctaws in the child-bearing years. Males make up only 44 percent of the population between the ages of 25 to 34. At the same time, the proportion of Choctaws, both male and female, above the age of 50 has increased.

Legally, almost all Choctaws are classified as "full

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[1] Statistics on the Choctaw population are summarized from John H. Peterson, Jr., Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Mississippi Choctaw Indians, (Social Science Research Center Report 34, Mississippi State University, State College, Mississippi, 1970).

blood." In those rare cases where Choctaw-non-Indian marriages take place, the couple is most often married outside the Choctaw area, or finds it expedient to later move outside the area. Children of these marriages are usually assimilated into the ethnic group of the non-Choctaw partner.

Choctaw is the predominant language spoken in 76 percent of Choctaw households. In 17 percent, both English and Choctaw are spoken, and English is the predominant language in the remaining 7 percent of Choctaw households.

The general level of education remains low. The median grade of school completed by Choctaws 25 years old and older is third grade. Younger Choctaws are far better educated than older Choctaws. The median grade completed by Choctaws 20 to 24 years old is ninth grade, while the median grade completed by Choctaws 25 to 34 is sixth grade. Nevertheless, the education level of the population as a whole will increase only gradually as long as many younger, better educated Choctaws migrate to other areas.

Social Organization. The two separate mass removals destroyed most of Choctaw traditional social organization beyond the individual family and kinship linkages to other related families. Residency in or identification with a particular Choctaw community forms the next higher level of social identification. To some extent, community identification overlaps kinship ties since Choctaw communities are small with most families having multiple kinship links with other families in the community. In the past, the lack of

transportation and distance have effectively isolated the Choctaw communities from each other. Recently, this isolation of individual communities has begun to decline as Choctaw students from all communities attend one high school, and as opportunities for jobs and better housing result in movement of families from one community to another.

Integration of the different Choctaw communities into a common social unit is provided by a common heritage and language as well as mutual participation in institutions reaching beyond community boundaries. There are three primary integrating institutions: the schools, the churches, and the tribal government. The churches and tribal government will be discussed in the following sections, while discussion of the schools will constitute the second part of this report.

Religion. While missionaries were active among the Choctaws prior to removal, most Choctaws remaining in Mississippi after removal continued to follow their traditional beliefs. In the 1880's some Choctaws became interested in Christianity and Choctaw Baptist missionaries from Oklahoma ordained local Choctaw ministers and assisted them for three years in establishing churches. Since that time, although the Choctaws have received some continuing assistance, the primary direction of the Choctaw Baptist churches has been in the hands of the Mississippi Choctaws. Pastors of one or more Choctaw Baptist churches in each community are all Mississippi Choctaws, most of whom conduct services in Choctaw. The New

Choctaw Baptist Association, organized by the Choctaws and composed only of Choctaw churches, was the only formal tie between Choctaws in different communities until the formation of the Tribal Council in 1945. This association and its individual churches have remained until recently the only formal institution entirely under the control of the Choctaws themselves.

A Catholic and Methodist mission have existed among the Choctaws almost as long as Choctaw Baptist churches have existed, but their activities have remained under the control of non-Choctaw missionaries and their membership is smaller and limited to specific communities. Recently, there seems to be a growing orientation toward secular leadership, but the churches remain an important institution in the Choctaw communities.

Government. The Mississippi Choctaws have been almost totally ignored by state and local governments. Although they were legally accorded all rights of state citizenship in 1830, Choctaws were completely excluded from voting until after World War II. At the beginning of this decade, only a fraction of potential Choctaw voters were allowed to vote. The inability of Choctaws to vote in any significant numbers not only denied them the possibility of having any effect on local governmental operations, but it also resulted in Choctaws not being selected for jury duty. Nevertheless, Choctaws have continually been subject to arrest and trial under state and local laws. Their contact with local and

state law enforcement officials was primarily limited to those situations where the interests of non-Choctaws were at stake. Otherwise, Choctaws had almost no contact with state or local governmental agencies or services.

All programs and services received by the Choctaw people were furnished by the Choctaw Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Choctaws themselves have had little voice in the administration of these programs. The creation of the Choctaw Tribal Council in 1945 provided the first tribal government since removal in 1830. This 16 member Council is composed of proportional representation from each of the seven Choctaw communities. The Council itself elects its own Chairman who is the official spokesman for the Mississippi Choctaws. Until recently, the Tribal Council has had no voice in the management of any programs of the Choctaw Agency, and served more as a sounding board through which the Choctaw Agency informed the Choctaw people of the status of various programs. Its own limited financial resources have made Tribal programs almost non-existant. Within the past four years, however, the Tribal Council has become increasingly active both in the operation of its own programs and in its attempt to influence Agency programs. This constitutes the most significant trend in the Choctaw communities and since it is most relevant to the education program, it will be discussed at the end of this report.

Economy. Within the past ten years, the Choctaw population has undergone major changes. These changes reflect a more

basic shift in the pattern of life in the east central part of Mississippi stemming from the decline of small cotton farms, the expansion of large dairying, poultry, and lumbering operations, and the development of smaller manufacturing enterprises in the towns of the area. The impact of these changes on the population in the area are indicated by the 18.7 percent decline in the total population and a 25.2 per cent decline in the rural population of Neshoba County from 1950 to 1960. During the same period there was a 61.1 percent decline in agricultural jobs and a 37.8 percent increase in non-agricultural jobs. By 1965, the continued expansion of non-agricultural jobs had curbed out-migration to the point that the Neshoba County population increased 1.6 percent from 1960 to 1965.

This pattern of loss of agricultural jobs, resulting in out-migration followed by increased non-agricultural jobs, resulting in less out-migration did not initially affect the Choctaw population. From 1950 to 1960, while the population of Neshoba County was declining, the Choctaw population in Neshoba County increased 12.8 percent. But during the early 1960's the trends earlier observed in the non-Choctaw population became observable in the Choctaw population.

The continuing decline in profits from small farming operations resulted in many older Choctaw sharecroppers becoming dependent on welfare, or subsisting through seasonal agricultural day labor. Younger Choctaws more often shifted to wage jobs in agriculturally related businesses such as

poultry, dairying or lumbering operations, or increasingly sought better job opportunities through out-migration. Between 1962 and 1968, the percentage of Choctaw heads of household classified as farmers, declined from 31.6 percent to 8.9 percent and those classified as agricultural day laborers declined from 16.7 to 10.2 percent. Out-migration was encouraged through the establishment of relocation services by the Choctaw Agency in 1957, and made more feasible by the better education received by younger Choctaws, their greater familiarity with the English language, and their increased knowledge of opportunities outside the Choctaw area. After the establishment of the Choctaw high school in 1964, increasing numbers of Choctaw high school graduates left the area to attend colleges and technical schools or to serve in the armed forces. Choctaws initially did not benefit from the expansion of non-agricultural jobs because of job discrimination. Being almost totally dependent on agriculturally related jobs, the Choctaw population faced the need for expanded out-migration as this source of jobs declined.

A great change occurred, however, through the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and especially those provisions pertaining to fair employment. Even before the law went into effect, local manufacturing plants that had previously not hired Choctaws, began to actively solicit Choctaw workers. This provided an alternative to the Choctaws who preferred not to migrate elsewhere, but who were not content with traditional agricultural jobs. The percentage of Choctaw heads

of households engaged in non-agricultural wage jobs increased from 23.8 percent in 1962 to 44.6 percent in 1968 with the greatest change occurring since 1964 primarily in factory employment. During the same period the percentage of Choctaw homemakers employed in non-agricultural wage jobs increased from 4.3 to 17.7 percent. The improvement in local job opportunities has, to some extent, curbed out-migration and has even resulted in the return of many Choctaw families long absent from the Choctaw communities. But improvement in local job opportunities has less impact on the better educated Choctaws. The increasing number of Choctaw students finishing high school and post-high school instruction still face great difficulties in finding suitable local employment and are leaving the area in increasing numbers. The Choctaws need to upgrade the skill level of both high school dropouts and older Choctaws. At the same time, more local jobs are needed that could utilize Choctaws with higher skill levels. Jobs also are needed which would attract Choctaw young people with higher educational attainment to remain in the local area. These needs are especially acute for Choctaw young men.

Social Conditions. The shift from almost total dependence on the cotton economy to an increasing dependence on non-agricultural wage jobs has had a profound effect on the Choctaw communities.

Population Concentration. The trend toward population concentration was begun by the Choctaw Agency for individual

Choctaw farms in the seven Choctaw communities, through purchasing land. However, funds were sufficient to provide farms for only a small portion of the Choctaw people. Most Choctaws remained scattered as sharecroppers on private lands surrounding trust land. As long as the Choctaws were dependent upon farming for their livelihood, they were forced to live in this dispersed pattern on trust land and on the individual farms surrounding trust land. Wage jobs freed the Choctaws from the necessity of living on the land they farmed. In some cases this resulted in Choctaws securing better housing in areas outside the Choctaw communities. On the other hand, wage jobs permitted an increasing concentration of Choctaws on or adjacent to trust land. Between March 1966, and December 1968, the population located on trust land increased 10.9 percent even though there was no change in the population size during this period. Currently 45 percent of Choctaw households live on trust land. The concentration of the population on trust land was made possible by the construction of over 100 new housing units. More houses are currently under construction. One Choctaw community is rapidly coming to resemble a small town rather than a rural neighborhood. This trend toward population concentration on trust land is reducing the rural social isolation of the Choctaw population, but its success in the long run depends upon the continued expansion of wage jobs.

Housing. In spite of the accelerated housing program, 54 percent of the Choctaw households continue to live in

small frame houses over 30 years old. Indoor toilets, baths or showers and running hot water are presently available only in about 20 percent of Choctaw homes. However, these same facilities were available in only approximately 3 percent of Choctaw households in 1962. Some 63 percent of Choctaw homes are still heated by burning wood in stoves or open fireplaces.

Consumer Items. Possession of consumer items also reflects the improved economic condition of the Choctaws. Ownership of automobiles and television sets has increased from approximately one-third of Choctaw households in 1962 to two-thirds in 1968. At the same time, one-third of the Choctaw population remains in rural isolation lacking most means of contact with the modern world.

Household Income. Household income has greatly increased in recent years and there is a more even distribution of households throughout different income levels. In 1962, 84.7 percent of Choctaw households made less than $2,000 cash income, whereas, in 1968, only 34.9 percent of Choctaw households made less than $2,000. In 1962 only 3.6 percent of Choctaw households made over $4,000 cash income, whereas, in 1968, 28.3 percent made over $4,000. However, since the average Choctaw household contains 5.5 members, it can be seen that the majority of the Choctaw people are still below the poverty line.

Family Composition. Mississippi Choctaw kinship terminology ranges from a simplified version of the more

traditional Crow type to a form more nearly approximating general American, with younger Choctaws more often following the latter. Nuclear families are the norm, and the number of extended families is declining. In 1962 nuclear families constituted 77 percent of Choctaw households, while in 1968 the percentage had increased to 83. The average household contains 5.5 members. Extended families are generally a result of poverty. Older Choctaws may move in with their younger relatives or these younger relatives may move in with an old couple, depending upon whose house or job is better suited to support the extended family. Young married couples often live for an extended period with in-laws. Again, it depends upon the individual situation whether they live with the wife's or the husband's relatives.

Seventy-three percent of Choctaw households contain both a husband and a wife, 9 percent contain a husband without a wife and 18 percent contain a wife without a husband. There has been a slight rise in female headed households in recent years. However, if the current out-migration of young males continues, it is possible that the number of female headed households will begin to increase rapidly in future years.

Health. Medical and dental services are available from the U. S. Public Health Service. The scattered nature of the Choctaw population, together with the size of facilities and staff, limits the health program. For example, the Public Health Dentist has little time for practicing remedial dentistry or serving the adult population after giving basic

treatment to Choctaw students. Inadequate housing, sanitary facilities, and diet further complicate the health problem.

Social Welfare. Most older Choctaws have not benefitted from the improved wage job opportunities. Lacking any job skills, possessing only limited education, and often speaking only limited English, and physically handicapped by their hard life as sharecroppers, increasing numbers of older Choctaws are becoming dependent upon welfare as their services as sharecroppers and agricultural day laborers are less in demand. Additionally, the number of separated, divorced, or unwed women with children has begun to increase. As a result, in 1968, 41 percent of all Choctaw households had one or more individuals receiving some form of financial assistance through the Choctaw Agency.

MISSISSIPPI CHOCTAW EDUCATION

History of Choctaw Education.[1] During the Choctaw removal in the 1830's most educated Choctaws went to Oklahoma and Choctaw schools in Mississippi were closed, leaving the remaining Choctaws largely uneducated and without any means of obtaining an education. As a result, Mississippi Choctaws remained largely illiterate until Choctaw Baptist missionaries began work among them in the 1880's. By the 1890's, Choctaw churches were actively teaching the people to read Choctaw, and Choctaw schools were established by the state of Mississippi in which some cases included bilingual instruction by both white and Choctaw teachers. This school system was ended with the second Choctaw removal in 1903 when again most educated Choctaws went to Oklahoma. Only one mission school continued to operate until the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools were established in 1920. From 1920 until the 1950's, BIA schools were limited to the elementary and middle grades with a heavy focus on agricul-

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[1]There have been only two formal studies of Mississippi Choctaw education. These are: Etha M. Langford, "A Study of the Educational Development of the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi," (M. A. Thesis, Mississippi Southern University, 1953), and Joe Jennings, Vernon L. Beggs, and A. B. Caldwell, "A Study of the Social and Economic Condition of the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi in Relation to the Educational Program," (Mimeographed Report, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1945). Contemporary Choctaw education is described in more detail in John H. Peterson, Jr., "The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians: Their Recent History and Current Social Relations," (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Georgia, 1970), chapter nine, pages 248-275. James R. Richburg's dissertation, currently in progress, will report in more detail on certain aspects of Mississippi Choctaw education.

tural and practical training. A Choctaw high school was established only in 1964. Prior to this, most Choctaw children dropped out of school upon completing the grades available in the school in their community. The establishment of the boarding high school at Pearl River has resulted in increasing numbers of Choctaw students completing high school and attending college or vocational schools.

The Schools. Almost all Choctaw children in the service area of the Choctaw Agency attend one of the six schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The six schools are located in the six larger Choctaw communities where they serve as a physical center of the community. Food and clothing dispersals are made at the school grounds and Public Health Service clinics are held in the schools. The seventh and smallest Choctaw community of Bogue Homo previously had a BIA school until enrollment became so small that the school was closed and students were sent to a predominately white public school near by.

In size, the six schools range from a two room school with two teachers to a modern elementary and high school complex with twenty-five teachers and 640 students. With the exception of this high school complex, the other community schools encompass only the elementary grades. Two of the remaining schools have six grades, the others have four, five and eight grades. Student enrollment is 164, 97, 47, 66 and 175 respectively.

In terms of physical plant, and equipment, the Choctaw

schools rank among the best in the state of Mississippi. This is especially true of the schools in the three largest Choctaw communities, two of which are showing substantial growth in population requiring new school construction. In the two smallest communities where out-migration is high, the original frame school buildings constructed in the 1920's are still in use.

Because of the scattered nature of the Choctaw communities, almost all Choctaw students ride school buses. Additionally, boarding facilities are provided in the three largest Choctaw schools for students who live beyond the bus routes. Since high school facilities are located only in the Pearl River community, most high school students use dormitory facilities. All dormitories have been constructed within the past 10 years and provide semi-private rooms.

Each of the 6 schools is equipped with adequate kitchen facilities to provide hot lunches. In the three boarding schools, dormitory residents receive breakfast and supper. Toilet facilities are within each of the 6 schools, and the newer buildings have restroom facilities within individual classrooms in the primary grades.

The high school has a gym for indoor recreation. An adequate stage for school programs is available in one other school. Otherwise indoor recreation facilities for use in rainy weather or at night are absent. Outdoor play areas are well equipped with playground equipment in five of the six schools. The school without elementary playground equip-

ment is currently undergoing a massive building project.

School Administration. The Choctaw schools are controlled and operated by the Choctaw Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Contact between educators in the Choctaw school system and other Indian educators is limited because of the spatial isolation of the Mississippi Choctaws from other Indian groups. Supervision over the Choctaw school system is exercised by the Muskogee Area office located over 500 miles away in Oklahoma. The charge is frequently made that funds for the operation of Choctaw schools in Mississippi are limited as a result of the lack of interest on the part of the area office in the Choctaw school system.

There are 7 administrators directly connected with schools in the Choctaw Agency. Six are building principals and the 7th is the reservation principal. Additional administrative support is provided by one educational specialist and two secretaries.

The median age for the 7 principals is 47 years with a range from 36 to 65 years. Five of the 7 hold a master's degree. The remaining three have bachelor degrees. The fields of specialization vary from animal husbandry and journalism to school administration. All principals are white and four are local whites. All are career BIA personnel.

Building principals are responsible for all phases of the school program from the lunch program to the instructional program. They live on the school campuses and are

aware of most activities that take place in their communities.

Building principals in addition to their normal duties fill in as substitutes for absent teachers and bus drivers. It is not unusual for a principal to drive a 6:30 morning bus route, teach all day, and then take the children home in the afternoon. Principals are not instructional leaders in their schools. They operate without a secretary so much of their time is devoted to paper work such as time and attendance reports.

Principals' cultural sensitivity varies from one community to another. Some principals are a real part of the communities and are accepted by the Indians. Others are tolerated. Most of the principals will verbalize support for parent involvement in the schools. But some would rather not be bothered with visiting parents.

The Teachers. Only five of the 59 teachers in the Choctaw school system have previously taught in other BIA schools. Most teachers enter the Choctaw schools in their late 20's or early 30's after having taught a few years in the Mississippi Public Schools. This practice results in the maintenance of an older faculty in the Choctaw schools. The mean age of the teachers is 43 years and 9 months. There are 10 teachers in the age range of 20 - 29 years, 14 in the range 30 - 39, 15 in the range 40 - 49, 11 in the range 50 - 59, and 9 in the range of 60 - 69. Their mean length of service in the BIA is 9 years and 8 months. With the average teacher

being 27 years older than the high school seniors, students are seldom able to positively identify with their teachers. This lack of identification also results from the high percentage of local white teachers on the school staff. Only one Mississippi Choctaw serves as a teacher in the Choctaw schools, although there are two Choctaw guidance personnel.

There is much competition among local white teachers in securing a teaching position in the Choctaw schools. The average teacher salary in the BIA Choctaw schools is above $10,000, as compared with approximately $5000 in the local public schools. Some local public school teachers have had an application for the Choctaw schools on file for some years before securing a position.

Although BIA teachers have a 12 month contract rather than a 9 month contract, they can qualify for educational leave in the summer. The competition for jobs plus the educational leave policy results in teachers in the Choctaw school generally having higher professional qualification for teachers than in the public schools.

Unfortunately, teachers in the Choctaw schools are not always chosen on the basis of their qualification. School administrators are said to have engaged in patronage and nepotism on several occasions. Certain local families have more than one family member employed by the Choctaw Agency and schools.

Not only are the vast majority of teachers local whites, but almost all teachers continue to live in local white

communities commuting ten to twenty miles to the Choctaw community schools. This participation in two separate communities creates quite real problems for the teachers. Through family relationships and friendships, they have strong obligations to the local white communities. If they were teaching in the local public schools, these obligations would be compatible with their obligations to the community stemming from their positions as teachers. But since the Choctaw communities are completely separate from the local white communities, the teachers' obligations within their own community compete with their obligations to the Choctaw communities. This conflict can be seen in both teacher participation in activities in the Choctaw communities and in teacher attitudes toward the Choctaws.

The school administration requires that teachers be present at school from 7:30 until 4:00, but does not encourage teacher involvement in community affairs. Many teachers view this as the limit of their obligations and strongly resist returning to the Choctaw communities in the evening for community events or to visit the homes of their children. Their commitment to their families and to their community of residence almost precludes their participation in the Choctaw communities. As a result, most teachers know little or nothing of Choctaw life outside the school grounds.

Teacher attitudes are also affected by their membership in the local society that has denied social, civil and economic rights to Choctaws. When they join the Choctaw schools,

many local teachers bring with them attitudes and prejudices concerning the Choctaws, including the belief that Choctaws are shiftless, lazy, and wish to live off the government.

After working in the Choctaw schools, teachers seem to take on one of two attitudinal stances that result ironically in the same type of out of school behavior on the part of the teacher. The first reaction is that the initial stereotypes that the teacher held are reinforced. These teachers will verbalize acceptance of the Choctaws, but will maintain the local white attitudes outside of school. Within the school, many students sense these negative attitudes and withdraw from the teacher, thus, reinforcing the teacher's stereotype of the Choctaws. The other reaction after teaching in the schools is a geniune respect and appreciation of the Choctaws and their culture. These teachers will not normally speak disparagingly of the Choctaws to other local whites, but yet will remain passive to the plight of the Choctaws outside their classroom. Within their classroom, however, these teachers are able to win the confidence and respect of their students.

The Curriculum. The establishment of the Choctaw High School in 1964 resulted in a changed focus in the curriculum from agricultural and practical training to the more traditional academic program typical of the white schools in the area. This is partially a result of the Choctaw schools having to meet state accreditation standards, and of the teachers' past teaching experience in the white public schools of the area. Classrooms are teacher dominated and instruction is

characterized by recitations and drills. Basic textbooks and curriculum are the same as those used in the white public schools in Mississippi. When a high school history teacher attempted to gain approval of a semester course in Choctaw history, the request was refused by the state accrediting agency. Materials on Choctaw history and culture are quite limited and little effort has been made to develop new materials. Key administrators feel that a major cause of the high drop out rate among Choctaw students is a result of the time lost during early elementary school years, while the students learn enough English to "cope with text books and teachers designed and oriented for middle class America."[1]

The recently instituted Follow Through Program is resulting in the curriculum in the first three grades (K, 1, and 2) becoming more attuned to Choctaw culture. The program is based on the Tucson Early Education Model which encourages teacher acceptance of the child and his language as a basis upon which further learning is built. Student decision making and self-initiated activities are encouraged. The use of Choctaw teacher aides and parent participation in the classroom has resulted in a greater incorporation of elements of Choctaw culture in the curriculum. For example, instead of using printed readers, Choctaw students illustrate

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[1]As quoted in S. Bobo Dean, Law and Order Among the First Mississippians. The Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc., Washington, D. C., pp. 50-51.

their own readers and dictate the text to the teacher. A second grade classroom recently prepared a reader describing a traditional Choctaw wedding which the students had attended, but which few teachers have seen.

The Students. In September, 1969, 1299 students were enrolled in the 6 Choctaw schools, but by May 1970, 110 students had dropped out of school. The Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates that currently approximately fifty-five percent of Choctaw school children will drop out before graduating from high school. The drop out rate has been even higher in the past. As of 1969, only 274 Mississippi Choctaw students had ever graduated from high school. Eleven Choctaws had graduated from college, and three have obtained MA degrees and some further study.

Most Choctaw students begin school with little English. English is not their language at home and their acquaintance with it is largely through the mass media. Throughout their school careers, Choctaw remains the language choice of the students. English will seldom be used on the playground, in the restrooms, or in other places outside of the teachers' hearing. Non-Choctaw speaking students quickly find it advantageous to learn Choctaw if they want to have friends.

Group and personal friendships appear to be important even at early ages. Best friend relationships appear to be secondary to a small social group of four to five children. This natural grouping is incorporated in instruction in Follow Through classrooms, but not in non-Follow Through

classrooms.

Almost 22 percent of Choctaw students reside in dormitories in the three largest Choctaw communities. With only one high school for all seven Choctaw communities, the majority of Choctaw high school students live in the dormitory at Choctaw Central High School in the Pearl River community. The high school is the pride of both the Choctaw community and the Choctaw students. No high school age students living on tribal land attend the white public schools, and high school students are quick to say that they would not want to go to another school.

High school social life is almost non-existent. There are no recreation facilities available at night except for the tribal community building gym located near the school which is used mainly for basketball. School facilities are not available after school hours. Theaters, pools, tennis courts, bowling alleys and other recreation facilities are not available on the reservation. Students do not feel that they are welcomed in the nearby towns and they do not utilize the few facilities available there.

When asked what they do for fun, a Choctaw student will usually respond, "nothing," or "just mess around." Pressed for a more descriptive answer, a few may respond "drink." Drinking does appear to be the major possibility for recreation, for both Choctaw students and adult Choctaws. Parents often refuse to allow girls to date because the young men drink. Some high school girls say, "Why date, there is no

place to go?"

Students are very much aware of the issue of race and describe some of their teachers as very prejudiced. A recent high school graduate related, "teachers forced the issue of racism on the students." High school teachers have been quoted as saying, "I would not want them (Negroes) to go to school with me - would you?" "If this is the way the teachers feel about Negroes, just how do they feel about Indians?" asked one student.

Indian students feel that their parents seek to be accepted by the white people. The younger Indian Choctaws ask, "Why should I seek acceptance by them? Why have we worked for acceptance?" Students are becoming proud of being Choctaw and with the development of this pride is coming resentment toward white teachers. "Teachers work here because of the money, not to promote the Indian. New and younger teachers are needed," according to a high school senior. Students resent the racism of local society and resent the social participation by teachers in local white society. In 1969, high school students organized their first student council. Student exchanges with Indian students from Oklahoma and Minnesota are bringing increased interest in student activities and self determination.

Adult Education Programs. The adult education program is quite limited, especially in light of the limited education of many adult Choctaws. Until 1968, one instructor attempted to carry out adult education programs in all seven Choctaw

communities. In 1969, a new adult education program was designed to take advantage of the facilities at a new junior college in Meridian, 40 miles south of Philadelphia. Students were tested and placed in appropriate levels to begin work toward a high school equivalency diploma. The BIA provided buses to transport the participants to Meridian. Approximately 40 adults entered the program, but after a few weeks, the number dwindled to about 15. The Meridian program has replaced adult classes in each community, although a few specialized classes are still conducted in various fields such as driver education, typing, and weaving. The new program has the advantages of a modern facility and a more diversified staff; however, the distance is a prohibiting factor. Distances from Meridian to the Choctaw communities range from 45 miles to 75 miles. Another negative factor in the new program is that it takes the Choctaws out of their communities rather than bringing educators into the community. This not only fails to present the local Choctaw school as a center for adult learning, but reinforces the existing separation of community and school.

In addition to a better program of basic education, there is a major need for programs in vocational-technical education. At present, some Choctaws participate in some of the area vocational programs, and others receive vocational training through OEO programs operated by the Choctaw Community Action Program. However, these programs cannot meet the full needs of the population. An additional problem is the

general lack of in-service training which would enable Choctaws to advance to higher positions within the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Clearly there is a need for a more comprehensive approach to adult basic education and vocational education.

A project attempting to provide this comprehensive approach operated at the Pearl River community from 1967 until 1969, but it was less than successful. Choctaws feel that one of the major limitations to the program was its emphasis on relocation rather than training for job placement locally.

School-Community Relations. The strict separation of the Choctaw communities from local white communities intensifies the division between the Choctaw schools and the Choctaw communities that has been reported for other Indian schools. Each school forms to a certain extent on enclave that belongs neither to the white community nor to the Choctaw community. However, since the great majority of teachers visit the school only during working hours or for special meetings, the number of persons actually living in the school enclave is quite small. Besides the school principals, some Choctaw employees, live on the school campus in all six communities. At the three boarding schools a total of six additional teachers live with their families on the school grounds. No teachers live on campus at the day schools.

The interaction between white professionals living on the school grounds and the larger Choctaw communities is limited. Children of these professionals take the school

bus to the white public schools, and the principals and teachers maintain a set of friends in the surrounding white communities. The Indian school employees living on the school grounds go to the Choctaw communities for their social life. Thus, while most white teachers are residents of local white communities rather than the campus enclave, the residents of the enclave tend to participate outside the enclave in either the white or Choctaw communities.

During the day, the bulk of adults on the school grounds are white professionals who direct the formal activities of the school. Visits to the school grounds by adult Choctaws during the day are usually limited to those who work there, or those seeking services. During the evening, when most white professionals return to their communities of residence, the school grounds are largely deserted.

Formal ties between the Choctaw communities and schools have been quite limited in the past. Traditionally, tribal officials and parents have had little voice in the operation of the Choctaw schools. In each community, the Community Development Club has had an educational committee that in some schools may have served as an advisory organ to the school principal. The usual function of the education committee, however, was limited to presenting programs on education at community meetings once a year. The Community Development Club did serve as a means through which the educational administration informed the Choctaw community about educational activities, but communication rarely

flowed the other direction. Likewise, the Tribal Council was periodically informed by Agency personnel about the educational program, but the Tribal Council rarely made any decisions affecting the educational program.

Significant Trends in Choctaw Education. Within the past few years a significant trend has begun to emerge among the Mississippi Choctaws involving a greater degree of self-determination, more community participation and a greater degree of Indianization. In part this is a result of the general spirit of minority group participation created during the activist decade of the 1960's and the rising educational level of the Choctaw population. Locally a more decisive factor was the creation, in 1966, of the Choctaw Community Action Program (CAP) funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity.

The CAP is administratively separate from both the Tribal Council and the Choctaw Agency, and responsible primarily to its own advisory board. This board has non-Choctaw members, but the majority of members are Choctaw and include several Tribal leaders. The CAP advisory board thus provides the first structure through which Choctaws can participate in the decision-making process for programs affecting the Choctaw people. The advisory board employs a Choctaw as CAP director and fills many lower supervisory positions with Choctaws. The CAP staff thus augments the Tribal Council as a structure through which Choctaws can hold positions of leadership and responsibility not dependent on the Choctaw

Agency.

Initially, the CAP programs supplemented but did not compete with programs of the Choctaw Agency. CAP training programs were coordinated with the Agency housing program so that trainees not only received work experience, but also contributed to the rapid expansion of housing on the trust lands. A commodity distribution program supplemented other programs of the Social Services Branch of the Choctaw Agency. CAP neighborhood workers assisted Choctaw families in securing needed services from the Choctaw Agency.

In addition to programs of community development, the CAP took several actions which directly affected the relationship of the Choctaw people to local government. CAP neighborhood aides played a major role in a voter registration drive which resulted in the first large-scale registration of Choctaw voters in 1967. The Legal Assistance Branch of the CAP provided adequate legal services for the first time for the Choctaw people. Two important cases brought to court by the Legal Assistance Branch in 1968 resulted in Choctaws being called for jury duty for the first time in local courts, and in the establishment of a Choctaw Police Force and Tribal Court.

The development of Choctaw leadership and the growing philosophy of Choctaw program control began to directly affect Choctaw education programs in 1968 when the CAP initiated the first tribal effort in education by securing funds for a Follow Through Program in all six Choctaw

elementary schools. The Follow Through Program incorporated a similar philosophy and structure as the CAP. A Policy Advisory Committee, made up primarily of Choctaws, had the power of policy making, personnel selection and program implementation. The Policy Advisory Committee selected as the instructional model the Tucson Early Education Model described in the section on curriculum. As was pointed out, this model resulted in the incorporation of an increased degree of Choctaw culture into the curriculum. In addition to selecting the instructional model, the Policy Advisory Committee was responsible for hiring of both professionals and para-professionals that worked in the Follow Through classrooms. Thus for the first time, Choctaws began to have an actual voice in Choctaw educational programs.

Choctaw involvement was not limited to the members of the Policy Advisory Committee. Choctaw para-professionals were hired by the Follow Through program to work in the Choctaw classrooms, and a program of college training was established to encourage these teacher aides to aspire to becoming fully qualified teachers. The parent involvement component of the Follow Through Program promoted school visits by parents, regular parents' meetings in each community, and an increased awareness of the school and its activities.

School personnel responded differently to the community involvement aspects of the Follow Through Program. Some personnel welcomed the involvement of Choctaws in the educational program, while others emphasized what they felt

were the negative aspects of the program. The full implementation of the Follow Through Program was initially handicapped by conflicts arising out of dual jurisdiction between the Choctaw Agency which remained responsible for the operation of the schools, and the CAP and Follow Through Policy Advisory Committee which were primarily responsible for the Follow Through Program. During the second year of operation, the Policy Advisory Committee became more confident of its powers of decision-making, and school personnel became somewhat more accustomed to Choctaw involvement in educational programs. Conflicts still arise however, and the Choctaws continue to press for a greater voice in educational matters. The formation of a Temporary Advisory School Board by the Tribal Council on June 15th, 1970, is only the latest step in the trend for increased Choctaw participation in all program areas of the Choctaw Agency. It seems clear that the Choctaw people, through their leaders, will continue to attempt to extend the degree of self-determination they presently have over the CAP and the Follow Through Program to educational programs in general, and eventually to other programs administered by the Choctaw Agency and the local service unit of the Public Health Service.

The Choctaws feel that not only will programs be improved if made more accountable to them, but also more upper level jobs can be provided for Choctaws if job positions are not closed to Indians through unrealistically rigid Civil Service requirements. Some non-Indians who hold positions in the

Choctaw Agency feel threatened by this trend toward Indianization and Choctaw control, and feel that tribal control will not only result in less efficient programs, but that it will also create ill will and increasingly isolate Choctaws from non-Choctaws. The Choctaw leaders counter this last argument by maintaining that they can better work out their relationship with local non-Indians and local and state governments if they control their programs rather than having their programs controlled by a Federal bureaucracy. The Choctaws recognize that they need continued and even expanded professional and financial help from the Federal Government in all program areas, but they also feel this help must be increasingly given through programs accountable to the Choctaw people.

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